

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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The New Edge on Pentas

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Pentas are those star-shaped clusters of flowers poking out among other basket components. Core series like Starcluster (vegetative), Graffiti (seed) and Butterfly (seed) assume supporting roles in the grand cast of the industry—character actors that bring premium, something fun and extra, to polish up the product.

Pentas Beehive spreads. They grow up, but they grow out at the same time. This creates a moundy, roundy 360-degree plant. Flowers are standard size, but leaves are smaller and petals more delicate.

Pentas are well built this way. They work in harmony with their basketmates, have stem strength with space to allow other plants to poke through, and provide a popular range of reds, pinks and white. Neat, tidy and self-cleaning, they lean back and enjoy the high heat found in the Southeast and Southwest. If you like the performance of lantana and vinca, you'll enjoy working with pentas. These plants are workhorses.

A swooning performance

To understand the future of pentas, look to the recent introductions. Swooning is the cutting edge of the category and the caliber of that performance is the difference between the competing series. Technically, a swoon is the amount of lean found in an umbel. Different channels value different leans in their shipping product.

For example, mass merchants often request product with just enough lean to reach the edge of the basket, but no more. Baskets ship cart-tight and they often sell off the cart as well. They need to look neat, proper and prime while they sit in their cubic volume or, at the very least, not harass their coworkers during transport.



By contrast, IGCs favor a lush, overspilling effect that gives the basket a high-end look. Lushness is visually defined by the overhang of plant material out from the edge of the basket—the heavier the overhang, the more valuable the product feels.

Pentas Graffiti Falls drapes. It has color over the top, but it really wants to put color down and around the sides of the basket. Compatible with standard Graffiti in size and habit, this series has one color now with more planned.

Beehive is the seed series Syngenta built to bring trailing features to the category in volume. Branching comes off the central stem at 90 degrees and then it turns upward. In standard pentas, that angle is 45 degrees, so Beehive grows a wider base in a full circle. It's been described as a little moundy, roundy meatball of a plant. This style of leaning makes it easy to control the amount of swoon up to the basket lip with fine precision. Vigor is tamped back to keep growth in line with the rest of the components. Inflorescence is the same size as standard, but the petals are a little more delicate and the foliage is smaller for better compatibility.

Starcluster Cascade is the older vegetative series Syngenta deploys. This series is mounding and semi-trailing, which means the lean isn't as large as the one in Beehive. The flower is tetraploid in appearance with a bigger inflorescence. Built from standard Starclusters, the Cascades are structurally solid plants, rigid and upright in the center, leaning on the edges, and spreading wider than they are tall. They're built for larger pots (quart and up), bigger premium baskets and products where decor is the number one play. They pair well with other beefy companions like mandevilla or New Guinea impatiens.

The draping one

Graffiti Falls drapes. An extension of Benary's long-running Graffiti seed line of pentas, Graffiti Falls goes all-in on the swoon. Similar in size to standard Graffiti, it has color over the top and puts a lot of color down low, as well. The effect is a large sweeping arc of color from one edge to another.

Overhang is a signature trait of Graffiti Falls. The umbels drape downward to establish color over the top and along the outside of the basket. Vigor is the same as in the Graffiti series, so the two fold together like Rogers and Astaire. Currently available only in Rose, additional colors are expected after their production trials end.



Rose can be paired with Graffiti White to make a Strawberry Sundae Mix. Plant standard Graffiti White in the center, then surround it with a ring of Graffiti Falls Rose to get a mound of pure white vanilla on top, overflowing with strawberries all around the edges.

Pentas Honeycluster sits tall for landscape work. This series is the robusto version. Leaves, flowers and habit are all beefier to handle rain, wind and weathering

outdoors.

Graffiti Falls benefits from the strength of the standard Graffiti line with its wide range of red and pink shades, a couple of violets, and two bicolors. Benary keeps refreshing the line with new colors (two new reds this year)—a sign that they're investing deeper into pentas for the long haul.

The landscaping one

To make pentas ideal basket companions, breeders dial back the vigor so the plants play well with others. Unfortunately, it's rougher and tougher out busking in the wind and rain of a garden bed. Vigor definitely helps in landscape work, so those projects benefit from a separate series to focus on their needs.

We've seen this before in gerbera with the Garvinea series and the phenomenon reappears here. Look to the Honeycluster series of pentas for annual garden beds. The understory is beefier and more robust, the plants are larger with bigger flowers, and the plants have the overall oomph to better survive outdoor work. **GT**

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